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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PLEASE PASS TO PRM AND USAID/LAC/SAM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREF PREL SOCI CO

SUBJECT: PRM'S A/S DEWEY DISCUSSES DISPLACEMENT, PEACE

PROCESS WITH PRM PARTNERS

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Summary

¶11. (SBU) As part of his March 7-10 visit to Colombia, PRM Bureau's Assistant Secretary Gene Dewey met with PRM partner organizations that provide short- and medium-term assistance to displaced persons. Most interlocutors agreed that there has been a significant reduction in the number of internally displaced persons since the Uribe Administration took office 18 months ago, but cautioned that this positive trend could be reversed if paramilitary demobilization negotiations break down or guerrillas launch major offensives. PRM partners noted that a decrease in mass displacements has been largely offset by an increase in individual displacements and lamented a GOC reluctance to focus on long-term assistance. PRM partners told A/S Dewey that they were generally satisfied with GOC-provided security. End Summary.

PRM Partners Note Decline in Displacements

¶12. (SBU) A/S Dewey stressed to PRM partner organizations - the Colombia representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Colombia representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Community-Habitat-Finance (CHF), UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organization, and the World Food Program (WFP) - the need to resist complacency in the face of a nearly 50 percent reduction in new displacements in 2003, and instead continue securing international support until Colombia's security situation permits the GOC to devote adequate resources to the IDP problem. All concurred. According to UNHCR, the reduction in displacements is the result of the paramilitary peace process and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) shift to a defensive posture. UNHCR cautioned that the IDP situation could change rapidly should the peace process fail. The ICRC also feared that paramilitary demobilization, unless accompanied by an effective state presence, could lead the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) to provoke more mass displacements. CHF noted that conflict between illegal armed groups in urban areas has produced an increase in intra-urban displacement and a reluctance among IDPs to settle in urban areas traditionally occupied by displaced populations.

Individual Displacements Overtake Mass Displacements

¶13. (SBU) According to the WFP, the decrease in mass displacements has been largely offset by an increase in less visible individual displacements. Significant numbers of displaced individuals do not register with authorities upon their arrival in large cities (as a result, they do not qualify for government assistance) for fear they will be pressured to return to their places of origin. The CHF agreed. The ICRC noted that individually displaced persons, as opposed to victims of mass displacements, tend to not return to their point of origin out of security concerns. The ICRC added that GOC emphasis on returning individually displaced persons to their homes is counterproductive. CHF added that those who return to their homes regions are not guaranteed access to land they previously occupied.

Need to Focus on Long-Term Assistance

¶14. (SBU) UNHCR and others agreed that assistance should not be viewed as merely providing for material needs, but also as ensuring that IDPs enjoy the rights and government protections enjoyed by other Colombians. UNHCR stated that the current system of assistance, with its focus on providing emergency aid for the first three to six months of

displacement, leaves many IDPs at risk. UNHCR said GOC agencies are not spending all the funds budgeted for populations in the post-emergency phases of displacement. The ICRC stated that GOC reluctance to focus on long-term assistance precluded the ICRC from doing the same. ICRC speculated that greater pressure from the international community was needed to convince the GOC to focus on long-term issues.

15. (SBU) UNICEF noted that the GOC's failure to gather sufficient information on displaced populations had led it to downplay the scope of the IDP problem and hobbled its ability to provide government services and protections. The WFP predicted that increased individual displacement would cause greater financial costs in the long run, because it is harder to attend to the needs of dispersed individuals than a geographically concentrated group. Cautioning against reliance on dogmatic distinctions between emergency and recovery assistance and noting that responses and assistance need to be tailored to specific situations, the WFP observed that PRM funding mechanisms allow for greater flexibility than those of other international donors.

PRM Partners' Security Concerns

16. (SBU) Those present said they were generally satisfied with GOC-provided security and noted that they generally had not been disturbed by illegal armed groups, although there had been isolated problems in conflict zones. UNHCR and the ICRC noted they have been fortunate, but worry that the security situation might change as the FARC becomes more desperate. UNICEF noted that the UN is not a military objective of the FARC or ELN. UNICEF expressed concern that the paramilitary peace process could result in a fragmented command structure in which individual commanders may no longer feel constrained to tolerate the presence of international organizations in areas they control.

National Planning Needed

17. (SBU) Participants agreed that addressing the IDP problem must become a national priority. UNHCR noted that the national response must involve local governments in developing local solutions. A/S Dewey agreed with the group's assessment and pledged that the USG would remain fully engaged.
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